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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OPENS FIRST AMERICAN CORNER IN IRAQ

¶1. Summary. The Ambassador and Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Culture Fatah Zakhoy opened the first American Corner in Iraq on August 8. The Corner, located in the public library in Sulaimaniya, enables visitors to learn about the United States and to participate in American educational and cultural programming. End summary.

¶2. The new American Corner is the first such facility in the country and is the largest cultural donation by the Embassy in northern Iraq to date. The Corner is located on the ground floor of the newly-built public library in Sulaimaniya, in northeastern Iraq. The Corner includes over USD 85,000 in books, furniture, and equipment donated by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad with the support of NEA/PD and Embassy Amman.

¶3. At the ribbon-cutting event the Ambassador told the audience that activities at the Corner "will broaden your perspective, deepen your knowledge, stimulate your imagination, and enrich your experience." Minister Zakhoy welcomed the opening of the Corner and invited residents to use it to learn more about the United States. Media coverage of the event included all local television channels and print publications. All coverage was positive.

¶4. The Corner is staffed by English-speaking employees and includes hundreds of volumes about the United States, a video and DVD library, three high-speed Internet-connected computers, and videoconferencing capabilities. Plans are already underway to connect university professors from the United States with professors and students at Sulaimaniya University through videoconferencing.

¶5. The Sulaimaniya Public Library recently opened to the public and currently has approximately 60,000 volumes. In addition to the Internet machines at the Corner, it boasts the largest high-speed Internet access point in northern Iraq with over 75 workstations (25 of which were purchased through CPA.) Internet access is free and uncensored. In addition, the library has three reading rooms, conference facilities, a children's library, and a children's theater.

¶6. Comment. The American Corner is the largest cultural donation by the USG in northern Iraq, a fact not lost on Sulaimaniya's political leaders. The leaders see the Corner as a USG statement about the relative safety of the KRG compared to the rest of the country. The PAO has visited the Corner and during that visit noted that the Public Affairs section in Baghdad is committed to providing programming and staff training. In addition, Embassy Baghdad will ensure that the facility and its information collection remain up-to-date.

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